

## **BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

### **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 24th January 2010**

#### **REPORT OF DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE (Author: James Stone, Senior Planning Officer)**

**SNETTERTON: Solar Generating Farm at Airfield Farm, Chalk Lane**  
**Applicant: PV Farms 01 Limited**  
**Reference: 3PL/2010/1211/F**

**Summary** – This report concerns a proposal for a 5MW solar photovoltaic array (PV array). The PV array is a grouping of PV modules with each one designed to absorb sunlight, which is converted into electricity, and exported to the National Grid. Key issues relate to the generation of renewable energy and landscaping/local character. It is recommended that the application is approved.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The application seeks full planning permission for a PV array development that will cover approximately 9 hectares. A 2.4m deer fence is proposed around the full perimeter of the development and supplemented with a number of security and monitoring systems, such as a PIR Detection System and Remote Webcam Surveillance system. A hardstanding area will be placed by the existing gates to ensure that maintenance vehicles can be parked well away from public roads. The initial stages are planned to be completed within 4 months of project start, whilst the generation phase is expected to span 25 years. During normal operations the majority of the PV array area can be integrated with the keeping of livestock. The site, which is to the north of the A11, currently consists of agricultural land that is located in close proximity to the Snetterton General Employment Area. There are existing industrial/agricultural buildings on the site.

#### **2. KEY DECISION**

This is not a key decision.

#### **3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

The following Council priorities are relevant to this report:

- A safe and healthy environment
- A well planned place to live and work

#### **4. SITE HISTORY**

There is no recent relevant site history.

#### **5. CONSULTATIONS**

Highways Agency - No objection.

Highway Authority - stated that the proposal is under the jurisdiction of the Highways Agency.

Quidenham Parish Council - No objection.

Snetterton Parish Council - Require landscaping.

Roudham and Larling Parish Council - No objection.

Natural England - Felt that the proposal would not have a likely significant effect on the Norfolk Valley Fens Special Area of Conservation or on the nearby Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Environment Agency - No objection subject to a condition for the effective management of surface water on/from the site, prior to the commencement of development.

Environmental Health - No objection subject to condition to alleviate noise disturbance.

Environmental Planning - Regard should be had to the impact of the proposal on the landscape and character of the area. Attention should also be paid to construction traffic.

Tree and Countryside Officer - Impact of the proposal on the landscape would be limited and the proposal offers significant opportunities for biodiversity gain. A detailed ecological management plan should be prepared.

Contaminated Land Officer - No objection subject to desk study/site investigation condition and unexpected contamination condition.

## **6. POLICY**

Relevant national planning policy can be found in PPS1 'Sustainable Development', PPS7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas', PPS9 'Biodiversity and Geological Conservation', PPG13 'Transport', PPS22 'Renewable Energy', PPG24 'Noise'.

At a local level, the following policies contained in the Council's adopted Core Strategy & Development Control Policies DPD are particularly relevant: Policy CP10 (Natural Environment), Policy CP11 (Protection and Enhancement of the Landscape), Policy CP12 (Energy), Policy DC1 (Amenity), Policy DC12 (Trees and Landscape), Policy DC15 (Renewable Energy), Policy DC16 (Design).

## **7. ASSESSMENT**

### **Policy**

Policy DC15 of the adopted Core Strategy supports renewable energy proposals in principle. This is subject to criteria including the impact of the proposal on the surrounding landscape.

### **Local Character/Landscape**

The Breckland Landscape Character Assessment indicates that the site is within the Snetterton Heath Plateau character area and the study considers that opportunities to reinforce field boundaries and maintain the tranquil character of the area should be pursued. A planning condition will ensure that the proposal is adequately screened.

Furthermore, it should be noted that development in the Snetterton Heath area is envisaged and this low elevation proposal offers significant benefits over greater elevation development. Each structure will be no more than 3m in height. The foundations for the solar panel racks will be by screwed piles wherever possible, to minimise the use of concrete. Given the current range of industrial/agricultural

buildings on the site, with some in excess of 5m in height, the scale of the PV array will represent a marked reduction in visual impact as these existing buildings will be demolished. No existing hedges or fences will be altered during the construction or operational phases. Finally, the modules are black or dark blue and covered with non-reflective glass, which reduces the potential impact on the landscape

### **Biodiversity**

The proposal offers significant opportunities for biodiversity gain in that land would be removed from intensive agriculture. The Tree and Countryside officer has asked that a detailed ecological management plan be prepared prior to commencement, describing cycles of grazing and cutting regimes, new planting and creation of bare ground.

### **Pedestrian/Highway Safety**

The site is to be accessed by the western arm of the existing roundabout at the top of the Snetterton slip road on the west side of the A11. This roundabout and the roads leading directly onto and from it form part of the A11 Trunk Road.

Access during the construction period will be limited to standard 40ft containers and commercial and utility vehicles. After construction, access for the operations and maintenance activities will be limited to 3-4 scheduled visits per annum by technicians. A hard standing area will be placed by the existing gates to ensure that maintenance vehicles can be parked well away from the public roads. Existing footpaths that cross the fields will not be affected and the site design will maintain this right of way.

## **8. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions relating to:

- Landscaping
- Ecological management
- Contaminated land
- Noise protection
- Surface water management